



Faith & Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants & Canada up for Success

Executive Summary Report
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Faith and Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants and Canada up for Success is a research partnership intended to explore partnerships between faith-based and government-funded settlement organizations in Ontario. This two-year project is led by the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR) and funded by the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)**. More information about this project can be found at:

[www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Faith & Settlement Partnerships](http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Faith%20&%20Settlement%20Partnerships)

The project used multiple methods. Case studies were held within the local study sites (Toronto, Peel, Waterloo Region, London). Other methods included a literature review and a cross-site organizational survey. Reports were written for each method.

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Definitions

In discussing the research, it is important to first define some key terms:

Settlement organization/agency: An organization whose primary mandate is to work on immigrant settlement and/or refugee settlement, with at least some funding coming from government sources.

Faith-based organization/group: An organization or group that has a faith-inspired mandate (which could include working with immigrants/refugees) and is connected to some kind of religious constituency.

Partnership: A collaboration where the parties involved agree to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labour. Partnerships can be formal with written agreements or informal arrangements.

Faith and settlement partnership: A partnership between a faith-based organization/group(s) and a settlement organization(s).

Local Immigration Partnership (LIP): A community-wide, multi-sectoral formal partnership funded by government to work at strengthening larger community capacity to welcome and integrate immigrants. The four LIPs involved with this study were: (1) London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership; (2) Waterloo Region; Immigration Partnership; (3) Peel Newcomer Strategy Group; and (4) Toronto Newcomer Office.

Introduction

Recent immigrants tend to be more religious than Canadian-born residents. Many immigrants of faith turn to places of worship - churches, mosques, temples, synagogues - for support upon arrival and don't always access other government-funded settlement services available to them. Given that places of worship are trusted spaces for newcomers, they can play an important role in connecting newcomers to other services.

However, due to underdeveloped partnerships among faith groups and government-funded settlement services these connections are not typically made. There are many reasons for this disconnect, often rooted in societal tension. If we can address these tensions and build effective faith/settlement partnerships, immigrants will integrate into Canadian society more fully which, in turn, will benefit Canada as a nation. But how best to do this? That's why we did this research.

One way through this tension with newcomers to Canada is government-funded agencies partnering with faith groups to help immigrants and refugees integrate into Canadian society. Settlement agencies have learned that faith-based groups and organizations have a local rootedness that allows them to reach newcomers in ways that settlement agencies cannot. If settlement agencies can mobilize faith-based groups, then it becomes easier for settlement agencies to provide services for a greater percentage of newcomers. However, this requires partnership and relationship-building with faith groups who are significant supports to the newcomers themselves. Thus, partnerships are being formed as Canada continues to welcome significant numbers of immigrants and refugees.

Project Overview

[Faith & Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants and Canada Up for Success](#) is a two-year research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and facilitated by the Centre for Community Based Research in collaboration with thirteen community partners including universities, local immigration partnerships, social service agencies, and faith groups.

The first year of the project (September 2016 to August 2017) focused on three different research methods:

- A survey of 73 faith leaders, practitioners, and stakeholders in Toronto, Peel Region, Waterloo Region, and London, as well as a focus group in Ottawa at the Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) conference with three local immigration representatives
- A national literature review featuring an annotated bibliography comprised of 52 sources (academic articles, mainstream articles, newsletters, and official reports) organized by the three main research questions
- Six local case studies conducted by community partners in Toronto, Peel, Waterloo Region, and London investigating faith and settlement partnerships in their contexts

The second year of the project (September 2017 to August 2018) focused on mobilizing the research findings. This includes developing a conversation guide for both service agency practitioners and faith groups to learn how to engage in partnership together, as well as producing content in a variety of other formats to engage important stakeholders about the value of faith and settlement partnerships. Check out the project website for more ways to learn about faith and settlement partnerships.

The research is organized around the three main research questions of the project:

- To what extent are faith/settlement partnerships viewed positively? (vision)
- What types of partnerships presently existed and how could they be improved? (structures)
- How can effective partnerships be better facilitated? (processes)

Present Situation

They exist...

Faith and settlement partnerships are already happening. According to the organizational survey, 81% of settlement organizations reported that they have worked with faith groups, and 78% of faith groups reported that they had worked with settlement organizations. When asked why these partnerships were forming, 94% of settlement respondents stated it was because newcomers often reach out to faith groups and 76% saw collaboration addressing a service gap in their community. For faith groups, 93% of respondents also saw collaboration filling a service gap in their community.

These numbers are supported by stories that were collected in the research. One faith-based respondent shared how their sponsored refugee family was able to attend a picnic with other refugee families which was sponsored by the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. The respondent also mentioned how London Urban Services Organization hosted a supper and parent session for Arabic speaking families. The faith-based sponsorship group contributed by providing information and arranging registration and transportation to these events.

One settlement worker described a partnership with a Muslim association which was an “amazing” bridge as refugees have started arriving into Canada. For example, they had 166 people arrive in one night, and would have been in complete crisis if not for the partnership. At another time, there was a group of Syrians that came into the community and they needed a larger location for their Eid celebration. Because the Association had a pre-established partnership with the LIP and the LIP had a partnership with the city, they were able to co-ordinate the use of a city space for free.

Partnerships form to ensure that newcomers are being integrated into Canadian life as fully as possible. Respondents reported that partnerships provide benefits to newcomers such as an increased awareness of community resources, receiving appropriate information and services,

making connections in the community, acquiring more supportive relationships, and increased knowledge of life in Canada including laws, rights, and responsibilities.

They're diverse...

This project initiated six local case studies to understand what faith and settlement partnerships look like on-the-ground. They reveal the diversity of faith-based groups as partners, which include communities of worship, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and culturally-rooted agencies. The case studies were headed by:

The Salvation Army: This report featured partnerships between one Christian denomination (The Salvation Army) and local settlement service providers in Waterloo Region, London, and Toronto.

Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) - London: This report features a partnership between a culturally-based community service agency (MRCSSI) and a government-funded settlement agency (London Cross Cultural Learning Centre).

Muslim Social Services (MSS) - Waterloo: This report features partnerships that MSS has developed with other local settlement agencies.

Interfaith Council of Peel - Peel: This report features a partnership between two inter-agency networks; Interfaith Council and the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (the Local Immigration Partnership in Peel Region)

World Renew - Toronto: This report features a partnership between World Renew (a refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holder within the Christian Reformed Church) and other local refugee resettlement service providers.

Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre – Toronto: This report features how a capacity-building centre (TIM), housed within Tyndale University & Seminary, encourages partnerships between churches and local settlement service providers.

They're challenging...

Faith and settlement partnerships are difficult on two different levels. Policy, as it is currently structured, can make it challenging on a structural level for settlement agencies to pursue relationships with faith-based groups. On another level, lack of relational networking between the two groups can also make it hard to form partnerships that flow successfully.

What are the specific barriers to developing partnerships? A significant one is the awkward relationship between government-funded social service agencies and faith groups. Social service agencies are hesitant to work with faith groups, and faith groups feel like social service agencies are not able to carry the full load of settling and integrating newcomers. As one survey respondent noted, “there are assumptions on both sides about the motivations of the other.” Agencies are not entirely sure if partnering with a faith group will result in loss of government

funding, and public policy has marginalized faith groups. Generosity and compassion are not attributes attached with salary; these are attributes faith communities often possess towards newcomers. Faith groups who are already working with newcomers have facilitated a voluntary culture of generosity and action which enables them a flexibility and mobility that social service agencies do not have.

However, faith groups feel they often hide their reason for being generous; that their faith expression and identity is not appreciated by secular agencies. In a sense, a significant barrier to partnership is faith groups not being given the space to express their faith as the source of their generosity. As well, they are not well-equipped to make their voices heard; faith groups instead connect with social service agencies on their terms: in action and in results. As one faith-based case study participant lamented, “they want to partner with us, they want to share in any benefit from our expertise, or our experience...without acknowledging our contribution.”

But this desire to express identity among faith groups also carries a tension with social service agencies. One survey respondent in the settlement sector notes that a challenge of partnering with faith groups is that “...sometimes the ‘faith’ dictates the services or advice we can provide...” At issue is the well-being of the newcomers and protecting them from faith groups proselytizing them. Faith-based volunteers also have sometimes given out faulty or misleading information to newcomers, particularly about the services and resources available to them in the community. Faith-based groups need to be properly trained and educated on settlement services and cultural sensitivity. For settlement organizations, this is a costly initiative.

But they have been possible because...

Developing faith and settlement partnerships is a counter-cultural activity for both government-funded agencies and for faith groups. There are many reasons to avoid partnerships and remain in silos that can be easily controlled and understood. The economic realities of Canadian society create an intense competition for finances, resources, and people. Agencies compete for grants and donations, and faith groups compete to maintain identity and keep people engaged in their community.

Forming a spirit of collaboration in this competitive environment has its challenges. It can be hard for organizations and faith groups to understand how partnership directly benefits their organizations – it’s hard in a group of partners for one organization to take credit for quantifiable results. Building partnerships requires a paradigm shift from “how can *my* organization or group help *those people*” to “how can *we* support newcomers *in our community*”. Partnership-forming is the ground for building inclusive and whole communities, and creates a multiplying effect that forms the basis for a deeper sense of social connection.

For faith and settlement partnerships to survive and thrive there needs to be both trust and personal relationship between the partners. Level of trust is a key indicator for determining whether a partnership will succeed or dissolve. Part of building trust is developing a common language for faith groups and service agencies to communicate. In dialogue, many things can

get lost between the lines and implicit assumptions created or reinforced. As one survey respondent offered, a significant challenge for these partnerships is “developing a common language together.” Communication is a key building block for developing trust, and trust enables a partner to see the strengths of the other and be willing to work with their limitations.

Faith and settlement partnerships cast a hopeful vision for the future where groups and organizations that could just as easily be competitors decide to partner together for the benefit of others in their community. Creating more relational communities means making more welcoming communities for newcomers and are a step towards living in a more whole society and world. Imagine a world where government services and faith groups were not constantly undertaking crisis management, but where challenges that newcomers face can be used as a kick-starter for forming stronger communities together. Relational connection grows in surviving challenges together, and partnerships help foster these connections.

Future Steps

This two-year project forms the groundwork for understanding how faith and settlement partnerships are envisioned and carried out nationally. As this project itself is a collaboration between many partners in both the faith and settlement sectors, we have had the opportunity within this partnership to hear each other’s perspective as we carry out this work together. Faith and settlement partnerships are rewarding and offer an alternative strategy for helping to integrate newcomers into Canadian society.

Exploring Differences

According to the survey, partnerships would increase for settlement organizations if they felt they were able to address a service gap otherwise not possible. Of secondary importance, settlement agencies also need to clearly see how partnerships presently support newcomers, understand the potential benefits and challenges of partnerships, and possess a clearer understanding as to the motivations of faith groups in supporting newcomers.

For faith groups, these themes were important, but most important to them was seeing stronger evidence of the benefits of faith and settlement partnerships and hearing more stories about other partnerships in action. It is important to understand that faith groups and settlement organizations have different motivations, needs, and questions about partnership that need to be received appropriately by the other side.

Sharing Stories

Perhaps the most immediate need for the future is for more documentation and sharing of stories about faith and settlement partnerships that are already happening. The Syrian refugee crisis provided a need for many partnerships to form informally. But as a relatively recent event, we still have not heard all the ways in which faith and settlement partnerships have been utilized in Canada. More sharing is required to get an accurate picture. This could be via

practitioners writing reports about their experiences on the ground or through academic research, but the study of faith and settlement partnerships is still limited by amount of knowledge recorded and shared. As the study of faith and settlement partnerships is very new, the more stories are shared the more opportunities for shared learning and knowledge to create stronger partnerships in the future.

Advocacy

Another need is for advocacy around policy-makers in both settlement organizations and government to create more openings for collaboration with faith groups. At present a concern exists among many settlement agencies that if they partner with faith groups they might lose their government funding. In an increasingly post-secular society, governments need to change outdated policies that limit collaboration with faith groups.

As faith groups are also often on the front lines of settlement integration, more representation at Local Immigration Partnerships and within existing settlement networks is essential for creating stronger partnerships. Currently, faith groups are nationally under-represented as stakeholders in these conversations. This is a two-way street; faith groups need to be invited, but they also could make more of an effort to make their voices heard in the settlement sector.

Culture Shift

As well, a culture shift is required on the local level which enables trusting relationships between settlement agencies and faith groups. Settlement workers need to understand assumptions and stigmas that they hold against working with faith groups, and not let those be a barrier for partnership. Faith groups need to put newcomer well-being at the forefront and allow service agencies to teach them information regarding the settlement process and available services. Without mutual trust these partnerships will not succeed; these groups need to step out of their comfort zone and engage each other for the benefit of newcomers.

Formalizing Partnerships

Most of the faith and settlement partnerships that occur currently are of the informal variety. This allows for much-needed flexibility to meet the needs of newcomers in the absence of clear policies. However, formal structures are also essential for providing longevity and sustainability to these partnerships. Informal partnerships work well to solve a crisis, but if these partnerships do not formalize than they will have to be re-created the next time a crisis happens.

Formal partnerships also benefit from pre-established understandings of role and how to communicate with each other. Creating memoranda of understanding from the outset are very important, particularly for service agencies, to establish correct practices in the partnership.

The research revealed a repeated need for training and capacity-building to help stimulate faith and settlement partnerships. Both settlement organizations and faith groups would benefit from sensitivity training and awareness to understand the needs and values of the other

partner. As a result, we are currently producing a Conversation Guide for both parties in the hope of giving leaders in these groups to facilitate conversations about faith and settlement partnerships. Keep an eye out for the Conversation Guide on our project website.

Conclusion

In our increasingly globalized world, we are experiencing rapid migration unprecedented in human history. As well, it is expected that the number of worldwide religious adherents will keep growing at least until 2050 (Hackett, Stonawski, Potančoková, Grim & Skirbekk, 2015).¹ Canada stands as a leader on the global stage regarding settling and integrating newcomers. With the increase of worldwide religious practice it can be expected that Canada's newcomers will increasingly be people of faith. This reality will continue to grow for at least the next thirty years. It is essential that Canada develop strategies to learn how to mobilize faith groups to assist with the settlement process as we adapt to this new reality. The stories and insights gleaned from this research can serve as a guide. Faith and settlement partnerships are one approach, and this landmark project helps set the stage for further study and action.

¹ Hackett C., Stonawski, M., Potančoková, M., Grim, B., & Skirbekk, V. (2015). The future size of religiously affiliated and unaffiliated populations. *Demographic Research* 32(27), 829-842. doi: [10.4054/DemRes.2015.32.27](https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2015.32.27)